DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 037 PS 020 767

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TITLE The Family Crucible and Healthy Child Development.
INSTITUTION Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 25p.; This paper is a reprint from Carnegie Corporation of New York's 1991 Annual Report and is adapted from the author's book, "Today's Children: Creating a Future for a Generation in Crisis." New York: Times Books, Random House, 1992.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; At Risk Persons; *Child Development; *Children; Disadvantaged Youth; Early Childhood Education; Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; *Family Problems; *Family Programs; Government Role; Health Programs; *Parents; Public Policy; Social Services
IDENTIFIERS *Family Support; Integrated Services

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the challenges that today's children and families face due to the rapidly changing nature of modern society, and suggests some solutions to help ensure the optimal development of children and adolescents. Rapid technological change, the decline of the extended family, the increased number of women in the workplace, and increasing incidences of divorce, single parenthood, and substance abuse have transformed American society in the late 20th century, making parenting both more difficult and more complex. To help parents cope with these challenges, government, health care institutions, schools, and voluntary organizations need to cooperate to provide a network of supportive health, educational, and social services that are available to families with children and adolescents in all communities. These services should include: (1) enriched prenatal care; (2) well-baby care; (3) good-quality day care; (4) family support organizations that build parental competence; and (5) youth agencies and organizations that provide young people with recreational activities and teach a variety of basic life skills. While the costs of such policies may be considerable, the social and economic costs of not implementing them, in the form of lost productivity, increased health care and welfare costs, rising prison populations, and growing social discord, will be even greater. Contains 45 references. (MDM)

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Carnegie Corporation of New York

The Family Crucible and Healthy Child Development

by David A. Hamburg, President

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Carnegie Corporation of New York

The Family Crucible and Healthy Child Development

by David A. Hamburg, President

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Carnegie Corporation of New York is a philanthropic foundation that was created by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to "promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States." Subsequently, its charter was amended to permit the use of funds for the same purposes in certain countries that are or have been members of the British overseas Commonwealth. Its total assets at market value were about $975 million as of September 30, 1991.

The Family Crucible and Healthy Child Development

In the face of the world transformations of the late twentieth century and their profound effects on families, the basic challenges of human survival and adaptability are being called into question. How to participate in the society in ways that assure the well-being of one's family and one's self, how to cope with imminent dangers, how to make a living, how to integrate one's personal needs with those of a valued group, how to meet the developmental requirements of children and adolescents — these tasks were simpler long ago, when people lived in small, stable societies, with their largely homogenous values and imperceptibly slow technological and social changes. The family household was the main site for the production of necessities as well as for the upbringing of children — their acquisition of economically useful skills, their formal education. Typically, members of the extended family were nearby, able to help in monitoring and guiding the young and to respond supportively in times of stress. Together the nuclear and extended families created a powerful support system that enabled members to cope with adversity.

The transition from childhood to adulthood through most of human history was steady, gradual, and cumulative. Tasks from an early age bore some discernible resemblance to the responsibilities of adult life and increased in scope and complexity as the children grew older. By the time they completed the physical changes of adolescence, young people were largely familiar with what would be required of them and what their responsibilities would be as adults. With some confirmation by a rite of passage, they arrived rather crisply at a point of adult functioning, or nearly so. They became valued contributors to the family and community.

Our world today is very different from that of our ancestors. Stable, close-knit communities where people know each other well and maintain a strong ethic of mutual aid are less common than they were. Economic and social changes brought about by advances in science and technology have produced rapid dislocations, some of them inimical to the family. By and large, young people today have less experience caring for children than did any of their predecessors. Many start a new family without the knowledge, skills, or confidence to master the complex and enduring tasks of competent parenthood.

NOTE: The president's essay is a personal statement representing his own views. It does not necessarily reflect the foundation's policies. This essay is adapted from the author's book, Today's Children: Creating a Future for a Generation in Crisis. *New York: Times Books, Random House, 1992.*

Modern developments have indeed provided immense opportunities and tangible benefits, but they are also confronting many children and their parents with unprecedented demands and stresses. For children, learning and social tasks are more complex, development is more prolonged, and long-term outcomes are more problematic than they were even a generation ago. There is less continuity between the behavior learned in childhood and youth and the tasks of adulthood than there was before. In a time when entire industries have virtually disappeared, the economic opportunities of adulthood are obscure to most adolescents. For parents and other caretakers, the struggle to manage their responsibilities to children, self, and society is more difficult. More women are raising their young alone, without social supports, and are in the work force, often having to leave their infants in the care of others. Families generally are facing great economic uncertainty and insecurity.

During the past several years, my concerns about children and adolescents have deepened. The more I have looked into their situation, the more worried I have become. What is going on? Isn't this one of the most affluent countries ever? Aren't most children growing up healthy and fine? Don't they usually emerge intact from their early "growing pains"? Yes and no. While it is true that many turn out well, with or without great difficulty in mid-passage, it is also true that substantial numbers are experiencing a formidable array of preventable burdens of ignorance, illness, suffering, failure, humiliation, and lost opportunities. Evidence indicates that about one adolescent in four is in serious trouble from teenage pregnancy, drug use, school dropout, and depression, sometimes leading to suicide. We lag well behind other advanced democracies in reducing infant mortality. Various measures of educational achievement reveal that our children badly fail to meet the standards of other technically advanced nations.

While adequate income and high social status provide no guarantees of healthy development, almost every form of childhood damage is far more prevalent among the poor — from increased infant mortality, gross malnutrition, recurrent and untreated health problems, and child abuse in the early years to educational disability, low achievement, delinquency, early pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, and failure to become economically self-sufficient later on. In short, a variety of indices show that children are suffering heavy casualties during the years of growth and development, and these casualties are not only tragic for them and their families but incur heavy costs for American society.

The role of the family as the fundamental unit responsible for the health, education, and general well-being of children is crucial. Whatever has happened to it, it is still the central organizing principle of society. But families do not function in isolation. They need an appropriate social environment to be successful. This means a supportive social network, the ability to make a living, a firm sense of community and belonging. In one way or another all families need help today, and disadvantaged families desperately so. Families differ greatly in their material resources and in their cultural traditions. Most are resilient in the face of adversity. But unless basic family needs are met, their children — our children — are at risk.

The evolution of the modern family and its rapid transformation has left us largely unprepared for the challenges of raising a child today. Children are in crisis

because families are in crisis. How can we save our children? How can we build a decent future for them? Most parents are deeply committed to finding ways of raising their children successfully in this hyper-modern world. How can we provide them a supportive environment throughout the vulnerable period of child rearing?

With all the radical shifts in family life, it is necessary to find ways to strengthen families where they are now vulnerable and to use other institutions to provide some of the necessary conditions for healthy child development. Is this feasible? The United States is a very large, highly heterogeneous, and strongly individualistic country. These are all potent assets, but they also engender the distrust and impersonality that have complicated our capacity to reach widely acceptable decisions about social policy. So as we struggle for consensus about coping with the problems of today's children, our first and crucial step must be to reach broad agreement on the nature and scope of the problems. What are some of the main risk factors that make modern children vulnerable to becoming casualties of the contemporary age? What are the pressures on the family — the most elemental crucible for child development?

THE AMERICAN FAMILY TRANSFORMED

The dramatic changes in the structure and function of American families can be highlighted by comparing 1960 with 1990. Until 1960 most Americans shared a common set of beliefs about family life. Family should consist of a husband and wife living together with their children. The father should be the head of the family, should earn the family's income and give his name to his wife and children. The mother's main tasks were to support and facilitate her husband, guide her children's development, look after the home, and set a moral tone for the family. Marriage was an enduring obligation for better or worse. The husband and wife had the joint task of coping with stresses, including those of the child's development; and sexual activity should be kept within the marriage, especially for women. Furthermore, parents had an overriding responsibility for the well-being of their children during the early years; until their children entered school, they had almost sole responsibility and even later had primary duties including guidance of their children's education and discipline. Of course, even in 1960, families recognized the difficulty of converting these ideals into reality. Still, they devoted an immense amount of effort to approximating them in practice.

Over the past three decades these ideals, although they are still recognizable, have been drastically modified across all social classes. Women have joined the paid labor force in great numbers, stimulated both by economic need and a new belief in their capabilities and right to pursue opportunities. Americans in 1992 are far more likely than in earlier times to postpone marriage. Single-parent families — typically consisting of a mother with no adult male and very often no other adult person present — have become common. Today at least half of all marriages end in divorce. The great majority of adults no longer believe that couples should stay married because divorce might harm their children.

Survey research shows a great decrease in the proportion of women favoring large families, an upsurge in their assertiveness about meeting personal needs,

and an attempt by women to balance their needs with those of their children and the men in their lives. A clear and increasing majority of women believe that both husband and wife should be able to work, should have roughly similar opportunities, and should share household responsibilities and the tasks of child rearing. An absolute majority of mothers of preschool children are now working outside the home. Moreover, there is a growing minority of young married women, often highly educated and career oriented, who are choosing not to have any children and who have little interest in children's issues — yet another indication of the dramatic transformation of American families taking place in recent decades.

While the birthrate of adult women has declined since 1970, that of American adolescents, especially girls under age fifteen, is among the highest in the technically advanced nations. Teenagers account for two-thirds of all out-of-wedlock births. There are 1.3 million children now living with teenage mothers, about half of them married. An additional six million children under age five are living with mothers who were adolescents when they gave birth.

Throughout most of human history, adolescent childbearing was common. But societies in those vanished times provided relatively stable employment and predictable networks of social support and cultural guidance for the young parents. For such adolescents to set up a household apart from either family was rare in pre-industrial societies. Even more rare was the single-parent family. Rarest of all was a socially isolated, very young mother largely lacking an effective network of social support. Today these conditions are prevalent.

It is startling to realize that today, whether through their parents' divorce or never having married, most American children spend part of their childhood in a single-parent family. The increase in the proportion of children living with just one parent (usually the mother) has strongly affected very large numbers of white, black, and Hispanic children. Female-headed families with children are much more likely to be poor than are married-couple families with children, regardless of race. By conservative estimates, one-fifth of young American children are raised in poverty, many by their mothers alone. Black families with children are more likely to be poor than are white families with children, regardless of family type.

By the time they reach age sixteen, close to half the children of married parents will have seen their parents divorce. For nearly half of these, it will be five years or more before their mothers remarry. Close to half of all white children whose parents remarry will see the second marriage dissolve during their adolescence. Black women not only marry less often and experience more marital disruption but also remarry more slowly and less often than do white women. Generally, as compared with other countries, the United States exhibits a pattern of attachments and disruptions in marriage that is certainly stressful for developing children and adolescents.

Divorce and remarriage bring a complex set of new relationships, resulting in many different family configurations. About two-thirds of the children in stepfamilies will have full siblings plus either half- or step-siblings. Many children will have multiple sets of grandparents. On the other hand, children of single mothers or mothers who do not remarry will have a more restricted set of active family relationships than children with two parents.

Especially in the United States, but in many other nations, too, mothers of children under three years of age are the fastest-growing segment of the labor market, so child care arrangements at the preschool level are of enormous practical significance. Even though remarriage after a divorce is common, there are still complicated problems of handling child care responsibilities in blended families. For parents who have never been married, the strain is probably greatest. They have all the responsibility as head of household and the least help available. About two-thirds of single mothers whose children are at the preschool level are employed, most of them full time. No matter how poor they may be, they must find some kind of arrangement for care of their very young children. More often than not, this means a child care center or other home that can take them in.

Child care functions are thus increasingly moving outside the home, with children's development often placed in the hands of strangers and near-strangers. As late as 1985 only 14 percent of preschool children were cared for in an organized child care facility. That figure has doubled in the last five years. By 1990 half the number of children of working parents were either being cared for in a center or in another home. In 1985, 25 percent of working mothers with children under five used a child care facility as their primary form of care, compared with 13 percent in 1977. In the main, this transformation was unforeseen, unplanned, and is still poorly understood.

With such a very rapid, far-reaching set of social changes, it is not surprising that public opinion surveys find many American parents deeply troubled about raising their children, and two-thirds say they are less willing to make sacrifices for their young than their parents were. Neither they nor the nation's social institutions have had much time to adjust to the new conditions.

HOW ARE TODAY'S PARENTS COPING?

Young people moving toward parenthood today face more rapidly changing circumstances and a wider spectrum of life choices than ever before. But choices and decisions and transitions can be burdens, even as they offer attractive opportunities and privileges. Young couples today often agonize over decisions taken for granted as recently as a generation ago. Should they get married? If yes, should they wait until one or both have a steady job? What about the fateful decision to have children?

Once married, it is very likely that both husband and wife will be in the paid labor force, and with the advent of the baby, they will have to renegotiate their relationship. How will they divide up the baby-care chores? What sort of parental leaves, if any, will either take? How will they handle the housework? How can they balance work and family life? If the mother takes off from work for a while, when is it sensible to go back, and how can she make the transition in the best interests of the child? Can they afford quality child care? If not, what alternatives are there?

Some studies have been done on the efforts of parents to balance their various interests and responsibilities in new ways. The results show that this is a complicated process that is in its earliest stages. University of California sociologist Arlie

Hochschild, coauthor of *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*,[1] has conducted systematic research that illuminates the tension between work and family. She describes the tremendous penalty women pay whether they choose to concentrate on working at home or to have a paid job. The housewife pays the cost of remaining outside what is today the mainstream of society; the working woman pays the cost in the drain of time and energy for family commitments.

The evidence clearly indicates that men are sharing very little of the burden of raising children and care of the home with their wives. Hence, as Hochschild points out, women are coming home from a paid job to work "a second shift." Most men devote long hours to their jobs. Even if they want to be helpful at home, their institutional settings usually do not make it easy for them to do so.

There is no reason to believe that this phenomenon of the two-parent working family is a transient one. Indeed, a variety of economic and psychological factors reinforce the persistence of the pattern as a financial necessity. For one thing, the actual and proportionate costs of child raising today are much higher than they were in the 1950s and 1960s. In many families, both husband and wife must have earned income if the family is to attain or maintain a middle-class standard of living. This is now a great deal harder than it used to be. In the past few decades the shift from a manufacturing to a service-based economy has brought a decline in wages for many people. The industries that have declined in the United States in relation to foreign competition are precisely the ones that historically provided relatively high-earning positions for men, especially those who did not go on to higher education. On the other hand, the new growth in the American economy has been mainly in the sectors that are major employers of women, where the pay is less. One effect of this is that parents have a great deal less leisure time than they used to — not enough time, perhaps for their children.

THE NEW REALITIES FOR CHILDREN

For all the attractive features of technological progress and economic success, the recent changes have served to attenuate human relationships in the family. Concerns have grown about the effects of changing family patterns — single-parent families as well as working mothers and remote fathers — on their availability for intimate, sensitive parenting of young children. The change in the frequency and quality of contact between children and their adult relatives is remarkable. Not only are mothers home much less, but, as mentioned, there is little if any evidence that fathers are spending more time at home to compensate. Only about 5 percent of American children see a grandparent regularly, a much lower level than in the past. Children spend a huge chunk of time during their years of most rapid growth and development in out-of-home settings or looking after themselves, which often means gazing at the mixture of reality and fantasy presented by television. Adolescents increasingly drift into a separate "teen culture" that is often lacking in adult

[1] Hochschild, A., and Machung, A. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking, 1989.

leadership, mentorship, and support — and is sometimes manifested in violence-prone gangs.

Such attenuation in family relationships is most vividly reflected in rising indicators of adverse outcomes for infants, children, and adolescents. Over the past several decades, the largely unrecognized tragedy of moderately severe child neglect has been accompanied by more visible, flagrant child neglect. This is most obvious in the growing number of adolescents — even pre-teens — having babies and then walking away from them. Young adolescent mothers are often less responsive to the needs of the infant than older mothers are. They also tend to have more babies in rapid succession than older mothers, placing their infants at greater biological and behavioral risk. Children of adolescent mothers tend to have more cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and health problems at all stages of development than do children of fully adult mothers.

But insidious problems have arisen in a much wider portion of the society. Not only are more children growing up in poverty than was the case a decade or two ago, but they are increasingly mired in persistent, intractable poverty with no tangible hope of escape. They are profoundly lacking in constructively oriented social support networks to promote their education and health. They have very few models of competence. They are bereft of visible economic opportunity. The fate of these young people is not merely a tragedy for them but affects the entire nation. A growing fraction of our potential work force consists of seriously disadvantaged people who will have little if any prospect of acquiring the necessary skills to revitalize the economy. If we cannot bring ourselves to feel compassion for these young people on a personal level, we must at least recognize that our economy and our society will suffer along with them.

As society puts a greater emphasis on options, freedom, and new horizons — an accentuation of the longstanding American emphasis on individuality — its side effects have clearly contributed to the sharp increase in the divorce rate, which turns out to have more adverse consequences for child development than most of us had expected. The conventional wisdom on this issue, which I once shared, was that if the parents handled the situation well with sensitivity for their children, the effects of divorce on the children would be minimal. And this certainly can be the case. But practically speaking, divorcing couples find it exceedingly difficult to handle such situations well enough over a long enough period of time to protect their children from the harsh psychological and economic fallout of divorce.

Various studies of divorcing families reveal recurrent themes. Marital separation commonly involves major emotional distress for children and disruption in the parent-child relationship. Single parents, try as they will, tend to diminish parenting for several years after the break-up. Improvement occurs gradually and is enhanced by the formation of a close, dependable new relationship. Over the years, the non-custodial parent's involvement with the child tends to fade. The effects of marital disruption vary with the child's age. Children aged six to eight react with grief, fear, and intense longing for reconciliation. Children aged nine to twelve tend to be openly angry. They are inclined to reject a stepparent. At both ages, the children's behavior often deteriorates at home and at school. The tranquil passage through middle childhood is altogether disrupted by drastic family changes.

The economic impact of divorce on children is often profound. Most children of divorce end up living with their mother. Since women do not earn as much as men on average, and absent parents frequently fail to provide child support, children growing up in single-parent families headed by women are likely to fall into poverty. In one study of divorces during the 1970s, poverty rates for children rose from 12 percent before divorce to 27 percent after divorce. The 1987 poverty rate among female-headed families with children was 46 percent, compared with 8 percent among married-couple families.

In addition to having fewer financial resources, single parents may be less able to supervise their adolescent children. There is evidence that an adolescent living in a single-parent family and having little parental supervision is susceptible to delinquent behavior and substance abuse. Of course, some single parents do in fact maintain adequate supervision and overcome many difficulties, but on the average the situation is not conducive to successful child rearing.

In contrasting today's vast, complex societies with the small, simpler societies of our ancestors — or even contrasting 1990 with 1960 — it should be clear that there is no point in indulging in nostalgic yearning for the good old days. History has had plenty of dark sides — immense human vulnerability to diseases, hatred, violence, and ignorance of many kinds. In any event, we cannot turn the clock back and there are many reasons why we would not want to do so. But the recent transformations are challenging families and other institutions as never before to adapt to the new world we have so quickly made.

NEEDED ELEMENTS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

During the past three decades, as all these remarkable changes increasingly jeopardized healthy child development, the nation took little notice. Until the past few years, political, business, and professional leaders had very little to say about the problems of children and youth. Presidents tended to pass the responsibility to the states and the private sector. State leaders often passed the responsibility back to the federal government or to the cities. One arcane but important manifestation of this neglect has been the low priority given to research and science policy for this field. As a result, the nature of this new generation of problems has been poorly understood, emerging trends have been insufficiently recognized, authority has tended to substitute for evidence and ideology for analysis.

All this is beginning to change now. While the government has thus far provided little encouragement or incentive for employers to help parents balance their work and family responsibilities, the debate is growing among decision makers over which measures can strengthen today's families — family leave for new mothers and fathers, job sharing, part-time work, flexible schedules, and the like. Within the scientific and professional communities, a remarkable degree of consensus is emerging concerning the conditions that influence child and adolescent development and how parents can cope with the changes within themselves and in the world that swirls around them. Much has become known about ways to prevent the damage being done to children.

Moreover, there has been an upsurge of programs in community organizations, churches, schools, and youth-serving organizations providing child care, support, and guidance for parents and their young. Successful interventions have taken many forms, including home-visiting services, parent-child centers, child and family resource programs, school-based and school-linked services, life-skills training, mentoring, self-help programs, and other supports. A number of exemplary programs in individual cities across the United States have achieved remarkable results. Despite their different approaches, they share a single key element: they have all found ways to compensate for a damaging social environment by providing conditions that can build on the strengths and resiliency of those caught in difficult circumstances.

Sadly enough, the emerging consensus and the positive results of some tried interventions are not widely understood by the general public or, for that matter, by many policymakers in public and private sectors. It is crucial now to have a well-informed, wide-ranging public discussion and to link experts with open-minded policymakers in an ongoing process of formulating constructive policy options. No single approach to families and children can be a panacea; many approaches are needed to span the main years of growth and development during early childhood, continuing through middle childhood and adolescence. But social neglect is no answer to the crisis our families face.

During their years of growth and development, children need dependable attachment, protection, guidance, stimulation, nurturance, and ways of coping with adversity. Infants, in particular, need caregivers who can promote attachment and thereby form the fundamental basis for decent human relationships throughout the child's life. Similarly, early adolescents need to connect with people who can facilitate their momentous transition to adulthood gradually, with sensitivity and understanding. Usually, despite the radical transformations of recent times, such people are within the child's immediate family; if not, they exist to some extent in the extended family. But if these caregivers cannot give a child what he or she needs to thrive, we must make an explicit effort to connect children with persons outside the family who have the right attributes and skills and also the durability to promote their healthy development.

Below, I try to sketch a few approaches, based on the latest research, that provide a genuine basis of hope, even on the toughest problems. Most of them center on early interventions that offer support similar to that of the traditional family. They follow a developmental sequence from prenatal care to preventive pediatric care to child care, from parent education to social supports to life skills training for young families and adolescents. Such interventions, if they were offered more widely, could prevent much of the damage being done. Action on more promising lines of inquiry and innovation could diminish the casualties still further in the decades ahead. How can we stimulate, facilitate, and accelerate the pace of this vital work?

Enriched prenatal care

The most fundamental point of entry for interventions that could be helpful to families with children in the crucially formative first few years of life is early

prenatal care — for both parents. The essential components of prenatal care are medical care, health education, and social support services. Good prenatal care dramatically improves the chances that a woman will bear a healthy baby. Mothers who do not have access to it suffer higher rates of infant mortality or may give birth to premature or low-birthweight babies. Yet prenatal care is now weak or absent for about one-quarter of mothers in the United States.

We can prevent nutritional deficiencies by educating expectant mothers and providing them with nutritional supplementation and primary health care. This integrated approach has been demonstrated to work well in the federal Women, Infants, and Children Food Supplementation Program. Through prenatal care, pregnant women can also be informed and provided necessary support and skills to help them stop smoking, minimize alcohol consumption, and avoid drugs if they are to have a healthy baby. The educational component of prenatal care can be expanded beyond pregnancy to include a constructive examination of options for the life course. That thrust can lead to job training, formal schooling, or other education likely to improve prospects for the future of the mother and her new family.

A major facilitating factor is the ready availability of a dependable person who can provide social support for health and education through the months of pregnancy and beyond. In one intriguing set of innovations, pregnant girls are connected with "resource mothers." These are women living in the same neighborhood as the adolescent mother. They have assimilated life experience in a constructive way, have successfully raised their own children, and have learned a lot that can be useful regarding life skills most relevant for the young mother. They convey what they have learned about the problems facing the young mother and in general provide sympathetic, sustained attention as well as gateways to community resources. Such examples highlight the crucial value of social support for health and education throughout childhood and adolescence.

It is vital that national, state, and local policymakers recognize the importance of prenatal care for all women. They need to understand that it will be much less expensive to society in the long run than is medical care for low-birthweight and otherwise unhealthy babies, particularly those born to poor women. The intervention helps two generations at once — and indeed can have lifelong significance not only for the children but for their young parents.

Preventive care in the first few years

Well-baby care oriented to preventing lifelong damage is vital not only for child health but for building parental competence. Immediately after delivery, the pediatrician assesses the newborn's health and informs the parents. In addition to providing immunizations during infancy, pediatricians also monitor children's growth carefully to detect nutritional problems — and treat infectious diseases. Pediatricians nowadays provide well-informed guidance and emotional support to help families attain healthy lifestyles. They foster attachment between mother and baby and help prepare her for coping with unpredictably difficult episodes with her infant. They answer parents' questions and anticipate questions about growth

and development. They provide other vital services — for example, early treatment of ear infections and correction of vision deficits so that hearing and visual impairments do not interfere with learning.

As the infant becomes a toddler, the pediatrician or other primary care provider, in addition to assessing the child's health and growth, can check the child for injuries or signs of neglect and abuse. They can help guide parents in providing safe play areas, dealing with difficult behavior, and easing the child's transition to out-of-home care and preschool. Since pediatricians are often in short supply, particularly in poor city neighborhoods and remote rural areas, it is essential to enlist the aid of pediatric nurse practitioners, home visitors, parent support groups, and primary prevention program directors in extending their reach. Neighborhood health centers have proved to be effective in reaching low-income children with preventive services, but they are not widespread.

More policymakers are seeing the wisdom of such preventive care for children, but greater progress has to be made on the most critical fronts: immunization, low birthweight, child abuse, and health education.

Dealing with child injuries

Still not widely understood is that the major health hazards for American children no longer stem from disease but from injuries — both accidental or unintentional and intentional. Injuries account for half of all deaths of children and are an increasing source of long-term disability and serious health problems for children and adolescents. Intentional injury and neglect — child abuse — is a very unpleasant subject, but it is slowly being faced as a national problem. Abused children are likely to suffer severe psychological and sexual problems later in life, all too commonly perpetuating this violent behavior toward their own children. The risk of child mistreatment is increased when parents endure a high level of stress, such as unemployment, and are socially isolated.

Despite the limited amount of research in this area, preventive efforts have been launched, aimed mainly at preventing repeated abuse in families rather than preventing the first incident. These interventions include parent education about child development and parenting behavior, counseling, parent self-help support groups, crisis centers and protective day care, home visitor programs, and programs to promote stronger early attachment between mother and infant. Such preventive efforts are a good deal less costly than paying for problems of seriously neglected and abused children later on. They deserve vigorous exploration and research.

Child care

As child rearing moves beyond the home, the quality of custodial care becomes crucial. The vast majority of responsible parents are eager to ensure that the care their children get will facilitate their healthy development. Just as they want a competent doctor to foster their children's health, so, too, they want a capable caregiver. Yet, the more I have probed into the issue, the more I have become

impressed with how difficult it is to meet this need. There is little precedent for outside-the-home care on such a vast scale as is now emerging in the United States. The crucial factor in quality of care is the nature and behavior of the caregiver. As the demand for child caregivers has surged, those trying to provide it have frantically sought to recruit more child care workers. Even with the best of intentions, this field has been characterized by low pay, low respect, minimal training, minimal supervision, and extremely variable quality. Although most child care workers try very hard to do a decent job, the plain fact is that many of them do not stay with any one group of children very long. This in itself puts a child's development in jeopardy; it is especially damaging for young children, for whom long-term caretaking relationships are crucial.

At present most professionals recommend that parents defer day care beyond infancy if possible. But as a practical matter, in the absence of policies for paid maternity leave, the trend seems to be increasing toward day care for infants. Many clinicians and researchers are working to develop effective models and standards of dependable day care that will promote normal, vigorous child development. At present the issue of what constitutes high-quality care and how it can be accomplished in practice is still unresolved. We can learn some lessons from other nations that have addressed this problem seriously. We need a better sense of ways in which policies of powerful institutions might help to fulfill the potential of this extraordinary movement. While there is an emerging consensus on what can be achieved, we do not yet know how to respond to this great challenge.

One of the most important findings from research is that children who have benefited most from being placed in child care centers are those who come from relatively poor families. Perhaps the rich experiences at the center provided such children special opportunities that they might have missed at home. Can we extract the essential ingredients and heighten the efficiency of these good effects, so that they may become standard practice?

High-quality child care and preschool education in the mode of Head Start has proven valuable for children age four and now is being offered to those age three. Overall, individuals who have been in good early education programs have better achievement scores in elementary school, are less likely to be classified as needing special education, have higher rates of high school completion and college attendance, and lower pregnancy and crime rates than comparable students who were not in preschool programs. The lessons of Head Start have wide applicability. Such valuable early stimulation, encouragement, instruction, and health care provided in quality preschool programs (all with substantial family involvement) can be incorporated into a variety of child care settings.

Early education should not be seen as a one-time event akin to immunization but as an important component of a constructive series of developmental experiences throughout childhood and adolescence.

Building parental competence

One of the most important and recurring themes in the research on early intervention is the potential value of teaching young parents to deal with their own children

effectively. Ideally, such education should begin before the baby is born. Thus, as indicated, a good prenatal care regimen would involve not only obstetrical, nutritional, and other measures designed to protect mother and infant throughout pregnancy, labor, and delivery but also some basic preparation for both parents regarding their tasks as parents and their own life course; in the case of poor parents at least, this would include connection with opportunities to develop occupational skills.

Because the first few years of a child's life are a critical period of his or her development physically, emotionally, and psychologically, the family's capacity to nurture — or its failure to do so — has the most profound effect on a child's growth. Research findings strongly support the centrality of a loving, dependable relationship for a good start in life. This does not mean that only one person matters to that child or that the biological mother must be that person. Certainly, a baby can form secure attachments with other caregivers and with siblings. Nevertheless, the research evidence indicates the great importance of one central caregiver who creates a sustaining, loving relationship with the infant. Expectant or new mothers or other adults in the consistent caregiving role can be taught effective parenting techniques including those that foster attachment.

As their children grow, parents can be helped by programs that promote verbal interactions among family members and the verbal responsiveness of adults to children. Numerous studies confirm that the mother's responsiveness strengthens her child's learning and sense of self-sufficiency and thereby opens doors to development that would otherwise be closed. Parents can also be helped to understand that there is an optimal range for the intensity and variety of stimulation for a child's healthy development. The great challenge is to devise on a broader scale family-centered interventions that will enhance children's cognitive development and emotional resiliency despite the problems of chronic poverty and relative social isolation.

As parent education programs spread, it is essential to avoid the extremes of dogmatism on the one hand and vague, wishful, uninformative approaches on the other. We have to look to the scientific and scholarly community as well as experienced practitioners in relevant fields to devise a standard of reference for prospective and actual parents to use.

Social supports

Studies in a variety of contexts show that social supports for families (that are eroded, disintegrated, or otherwise weakened under circumstances of persistent poverty and social depreciation) can buffer the effects of stressful life transitions for both parents and children. We can no longer take for granted the supportive systems that were built into human experience over millions of years. Even the most successful, capable parents cannot teach their children the wide array of skills needed for today's complicated, rapidly changing society. Increasingly, we must consider crucial skills for education and health that have a strong bearing on survival and the quality of life in contemporary American society — one of the biggest, most complicated, rapidly changing societies that has ever existed.

Institutions and organizations beyond the family can provide the necessary social support, strengthening the family and/or offering surrogates for parents, older siblings, or an extended family. Examples of such interventions are in communities across the country, in churches, schools, agencies, and minority-run organizations. They build constructive networks for families that serve parents and attract youngsters in ways that foster their health, their education, and their capacity to be accepted rather than rejected by the mainstream society.

Whereas parent education efforts have historically focused on the child, family support efforts view the entire family as one unit. Their goals are to augment parents' knowledge of and skill in child rearing, to enhance their skills in coping with the child and other family matters, to help families gain access to services and community resources, to facilitate the development of informal support networks among parents, and to organize to counteract dangerous trends in the community. Most of these programs are served by paraprofessionals who are members of the community, although professionals are involved.

Social supports for adolescent mothers are particularly vital, especially for those who are poor and socially isolated. Effective programs not only teach parenting skills and ensure the provision of needed services in health and education, they help mothers stay in school and acquire skills for gainful employment. Evaluations of some interventions show that young mothers improve their diets, smoke less, and generally take better care of themselves and their babies than those who do not have such services; they also have fewer children.

Support to families with adolescents

Compared to families with young children, families with adolescents have been neglected. Even for the affluent sector, little work has been done on strengthening support networks for families during the stresses of the great transition from childhood to adulthood. Still less attention has gone into strengthening networks for families who live in poverty or culturally different situations.

Although adolescents are moving toward independence, they are still intimately bound up with the family, which is typically much more important to them than is evident. This is especially true during early adolescence. For that reason, we need to pay substantial attention to the ways in which family relationships can be utilized to help adolescents weather the radically transformed conditions of contemporary life. This is a difficult time for parents, too. Their own marital relationships, their own coping skills, are often in transition. They may need help in renegotiating family relationships at this time.

Professor Stephen Small for the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development has identified forty-one programs that are making serious efforts to strengthen families' capacity to tackle the problems associated with adolescent development. Most of these programs center around curricula developed for this purpose and made available for use by local organizations. Some of the more promising ones Small identified are initiated and maintained by voluntary youth-serving organizations such as the Boys Clubs of America, the 4-H Clubs, and the Parent-Teacher Association. One of Small's strongest recommendations is to give parents a way

to obtain social support from other parents — sharing experience, pooling information and coping strategies. A mutual-aid ethic among parents who have a common concern for the well-being of their developing adolescents and yet who bring diverse experiences in the encounter can be helpful.

Life skills training

Adolescents have to navigate through a mine field of risks to their healthy education and development. They need attention from adults who can be positive role models, mentors, and sources of accurate information on important topics. They need to understand the biological changes of puberty and the immediate and long-term health consequences of lifestyle choices. They need to learn interpersonal and communication skills, self regulation, decision making, and problem solving.

Today there are few guidelines for behavior available to children or even to the adults around them. Many of the messages they receive are conflicting or ambiguous. Clearly, our adolescents need life skills training — the formal teaching of requisite skills for surviving, living with others, and succeeding in a complex society.

Formal education can provide or at least supplement the life skills training that historically was built into the informal processes of family and kin relationships. Successful school programs are typically administered by agencies outside of the schools; many use some variant of social skills training and use peers in their interventions. Across the nation, most communities have programs outside the schools that offer youngsters recreation or teach them skills. Youth agencies, such as Girls, Inc., serve about 25 million young people annually and thus are in regular contact with almost as many children as are the schools. They aim to help teens acquire social skills, develop a constructive personal identity, and build a dependable basis for earned respect. Their strengths are that they are free to experiment, they reach children early, and they typically work in small groups with ten to fifteen young people at a time. Effective programs tend to respond to more than one serious problem or risk factor and try to create incentives for dealing with them that adolescents perceive as relevant to their own lives.

Based on the lessons of experience with all such approaches that work for families and children, it should be possible in the foreseeable future to design interventions that go beyond what has been possible up to now. First, we can use our experience from the programs so far undertaken, ascertain which are the most effective and which need the most attention, and construct informed models for future interventions. With so much at stake — terrible suffering, grievous loss of talent and life — we can surely find ways to make these programs available on a much wider scale.

STRENGTHENING DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Democratic societies are being challenged as never before to give all our children, regardless of social background, a good opportunity to participate in the modern technical world. This means, among other tasks, preparing them to qualify for

modern employment opportunities; to achieve at least a decent minimum of literacy in science and technology as part of everyone's educational heritage; to make lifelong learning a reality so that people can adjust their knowledge and skills to technical change; and to foster a scientific attitude useful both in problem solving throughout society and in understanding scientific aspects of the major issues on which an informed citizenry must decide. Any modern nation needs to develop the talents of all its people if it is to be economically vigorous and socially cohesive in the different world of the next century.

Not only the family but the world of work is being rapidly transformed by science and technology. One upshot is that work will require much technical competence and a great deal of flexibility. Each of us will need not just one set of skills for a lifetime, but an adaptability to an evolving body of knowledge and new opportunities calling for greatly modified skills in the years beyond formal schooling. The work force will have to be more skillful and adaptable than it is now — at every level from the factory floor to top management.

Traditionally, America's technologically educated work force, which has by and large been very efficient by world standards, has come from a small fraction of the white, male, college-educated population. We have skimmed the cream of a very preferred, fortunate group, while blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and even women have historically been badly underrepresented in the fields that require technical competence. Now, however, the traditional white male source of scientists and engineers is inadequate, even if we were not interested in rectifying historical injustices, at the very time that more technically trained people are needed. This brings the country to a very interesting point, a point where equity intersects with economic vitality, democratic civility, and military security. Because of this intersection, there are now broader and more urgent reasons than ever before to support an unprecedented effort in the education of disadvantaged minority children. What must motivate us is not only decency but also national interest.

In the years immediately ahead, the number of young people in the United States will be smaller than in recent decades. Fewer young people will enter the work force. By the year 2000, about one-third of these young people will be black or Hispanic, the groups now at the bottom of the educational and economic ladder. Already, in the 1990s, racial and ethnic minorities constitute the majority of primary and secondary school students in twenty-three of the twenty-five largest American cities. In eight more years, they will be the majority of the populations of fifty-three major cities.

While the lives of individual members of minority groups have greatly improved since the 1960s, many of the millions remaining in the inner cities have been relegated to marginal status in our society. They are the poorest and least-educated Americans and are served by the least-adequate health care in the nation. As in past generations, those who can escape severely damaged environments do so, leaving behind those who have come of age on the streets, without stable adult models and constructive support systems and often without parents. For the majority of American schoolchildren to be excluded from the mainstream of education and worthwhile jobs in the next century would be a personal loss for the individuals

themselves and a tragic waste of human resources that will weaken the country's economic and social foundations. Increasingly, this injustice threatens our democratic foundations — and our economic vitality as well. In the United States, it is in the straightforward national interest that minority students be educated equally with majority students, particularly in the science-based fields. The country can no longer endure the drainage of talent that has been the norm up to now.

For these reasons, the entire sequence of developmentally useful interventions sketched in this essay must be applied in a concerted way to poor and disadvantaged communities. There is much that can be achieved if we think of our entire population as a very large extended family — tied by history to a shared destiny and therefore requiring a strong ethic of mutual aid.

WEIGHING THE COSTS

The biology of our species makes necessary a huge parental investment in order to achieve the fulfillment of each child's potential. This means far more than an economic investment. It is a continuing, relentless, recurrent demand for investment of time, energy, thought, consideration, and sensitivity. It is an investment in patience, understanding, and coping. It requires persistence, determination, commitment, and resiliency. The awareness of such a large investment, however vaguely formulated, has recently inhibited many young people from undertaking child rearing, now that the choice is readily available to them. Others have gone ahead and started families, only to find they are unprepared for the challenge. If they cannot or will not give their children what they need, then others must do so. But who? In general, parents have responded that they are willing to do a good deal of what is necessary but cannot do all of it. Therefore, we have seen the rise of institutions that provide parent-equivalent functions. We are in mid-passage in this process; no one can say with justifiable confidence what the consequences will be for the generation of children in crisis.

In almost all cases, the expenditures required for optimal child and adolescent development are not simply add-ons but can be at least partly achieved by wiser use of existing funds. Huge amounts are already spent for these purposes. Much of this current spending could be greatly improved and redirected by some of the measures suggested here. To replace inadequate interventions would in some cases cost less and in other cases cost more than we are now spending. This sort of analysis must largely be done on a case-by-case, place-by-place basis. What is likely is that the total economic and social costs of present child-relevant activities could be greatly reduced.

For the atrocities now being committed on our children — however inadvertently and regretfully — we are all paying a great deal. These costs have many facets: economic inefficiency, loss of productivity, lack of skill, high health care costs, growing prison costs, and a badly ripped social fabric. One way or another, we pay. I have tried to suggest lines of caring for our children, including parental support programs, that would lead to better results on our investment in the future that we all share. It is intended to stimulate serious reflection on such matters and

to move us toward taking up these crucial responsibilities. These vital investments have to be viewed for what they are — a responsibility not only of the family but of the entire society. It is not just the federal government but other levels of government; not just business but labor; not just light-skinned people but dark-skinned as well; not just the rich but the middle class and the poor. We are all in this huge leaking boat together. We will all have to pay and reason and care and work together. Our usual short-term view will not suffice. There are many useful, constructive steps to be taken but no quick fix, no magic bullet, no easy way. We will not get rich quick on the backs of our children.

We have to move beyond the easy and pervasive recourse of passing the buck. It is our responsibility — each individual, each institution and organization, every business, all levels of government. We cannot lose sight of the fact that wise investment in human capital is the most fundamental and productive investment any society can make. Constructive development of our children is more important than oil or minerals, office buildings or factories, roads or weapons. The central fact is that all of these and much more depend in the long run on the quality of human resources and the decency of human relations. If these deteriorate, all else declines.

A FINAL WORD

The interventions in health and the social environment for families and children I have summarized have a lot to do with the kind of future we will have. Sadly, very few complete models of modern programs to meet children's needs are available. Major components of such programs do exist all across the country and in other nations as well. Increasingly, we will have to put these components together in ways that provide our children with the full range of developmental opportunities permitted by today's knowledge and emerging research findings. We will need to hammer out some broad guidelines for the division of labor in each major sphere — from prenatal care to graduate education. We badly need to strengthen research on social change, including institutional as well as individual responses. Research on parent-equivalent functions and careful observation of leading-edge innovations can help us decide which models actually work for what purpose in fostering children's healthy growth and development — and at what cost. Some of this knowledge is already available; much more will become available in the 1990s. This knowledge provides a great challenge for finding ways to scale up the best family support and child development programs beyond a few communities to cover an entire population. But even as we study these changes, they often outpace our capacity to monitor and understand them. Can we build institutional capacity to catch up and stay up to date in a continuing, long-term way?

In the end, I am hopeful. As a nation, we are awakening to the gravity of the problems of today's children. This should make it possible for us to utilize the experience of interventions so far undertaken and to improve them by strengthening our research capability in the biomedical and behavioral sciences that bear upon child development, health, and education. Armed with these bodies of knowledge

and experience, we can construct more effective interventions for our children in the years ahead — both within the family and beyond it. We can address such great problems effectively, we can relieve terrible suffering, we can stem the grievous loss of talent and life — if we have the vision and the decency to invest responsibly in tomorrow's children and thereby in the future of all humanity.

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President

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